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AUTHOR Hoder-Salmon, Marilyn
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ABSTRACT

In July 1988, 14 Florida scholars traveled to India on a 6-week followup of a 1976 project on the status of women in India. Headquartered in Madras (India), the group also studied in 12 other locations. A pre-departure orientation program included lectures on health and related issues, a discussion of life in an Indian village, films, and slides of the 1976 seminar. Activities in India included meetings with educators and researchers on women's roles, education, work, social life and cultural practices, political history, and topics of special interest to group members; and visits to related organizations and locations. Program results include enhanced teaching and scholarship, participation in a variety of conferences, development of an anthology of essays based on the experiences in India, a bibliography, a slide show for use by academic institutions, increased library holdings at Florida International University, and collegial and scholarly exchanges.
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FINAL REPORT TO: FULBRIGHT-HAYS GROUP PROJECTS ABROAD PROGRAM
Center for International Education
International Studies Branch

ON: INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S STUDIES SEMINAR ON CHANGING STATUS
ROLES IN INDIA

Florida International University
Women's Studies Center
University Park
Miami, FL 33199
Project Director: Marilyn Hoder-Salmon, Ph.D

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AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory is a two-year project seeking to establish and test a model system for collecting and disseminating information on model programs at AASCU-member institutions--375 of the public four-year colleges and universities in the United States.

The four objectives of the project are:

- o To increase the information on model programs available to all institutions through the ERIC system
- o To encourage the use of the ERIC system by AASCU institutions
- o To improve AASCU's ability to know about, and share information on, activities at member institutions, and
- o To test a model for collaboration with ERIC that other national organizations might adopt.

The AASCU/ERIC Model Programs Inventory Project is funded with a grant from the Fund for the Improvement of Postsecondary Education to the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, in collaboration with the ERIC Clearinghouse on Higher Education at The George Washington University.

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SAMYA SHAKTI*- Equality/Power

INTERNATIONAL WOMEN'S STUDIES SEMINAR ON CHANGING STATUS ROLES
IN INDIA

On July 7, 1988 fourteen Florida scholars departed Miami for New Delhi to commence our six-week follow-up project, (of the 1976 Decade of Women, Florida International University's Proposal) on the status of women in India. During that time we were headquartered in Madras City for the academic program, under the auspices of Stella Maris College, program director Dr. Mary John, and then conducted further study and travel throughout India to a total of twelve destinations: New Delhi, Hyderabad, Bangalore, Mysore, Madras, Trivandrum, Bombay, Banares, Khajuraho, Agra, Jaipur and Mahabalipuram.

Predeparture activities included a thorough state-wide search for outstanding scholars in the field of women's studies who teach and do research that would benefit from study about the situation of women in a third world country. A university interdisciplinary faculty committee made the final selections, (list attached) a diverse and interesting group of faculty. In January we began a concentrated series of mailings in preparation for our international seminar. Participants were sent copies of articles, bibliographies and related background materials that eventually comprised more than 1,500 pages. When we met in Miami in July for the predeparture orientation our participants were already steeped in information about the women of India, as well as travel details.

The orientation provided further information and important meetings on various themes. A noted physician of tropical medicine, Dr. Caroline McCloud, who has traveled in India, gave a very important lecture on health and related matters. Dr. Maneck Daruwala shared her recollections of a childhood in an Indian village; various films were shown, such as the recent excellent film, "No Longer Silent"; we viewed slides of the 1976 seminar and other speakers filled out our pre-departure orientation.

* Title of the Women's Studies Journal,
Centre for Women's Development Studies

Upon our arrival in New Delhi we began several days of further orientation and meetings. Mrs. Sharada Nayak and R. K. Nehru of the USEFI staff prepared an excellent welcome and started us on our meetings with academic and professional women. Our initial meetings in New Delhi included a visit to the Center for Women's Development Studies, the first program for women's studies research in India, where we met with Dr. Sumita Asija and learned about their history and current projects. Another program featured Dr. Susheela Kaushik, director, Women's Studies and Development Centre, Delhi University, on a panel on the "changing role of women." We also met with Dr. Promilla Kapur, noted sociologist and author of "Love, Marriage, Sex and the Changing Role of the Indian Woman."

Before departing for Madras we spent several days in Hyderabad and Bangalore. An academic highlight of Hyderabad was our visit to Andhra Mahila Sabha where we heard a panel on their projects and visited literacy and job-training programs. In Bangalore we met with Dr. C. N. Mangala of N.M.K.R.V. First Grade College for Women. With Dr. Mangala we went to the site of a village where the young women students of the college are building brick houses to improve the quality of life. Another highlight was our visit to a well-known women's bookstore and meeting place, Stree Lekha, where a founding member delivered a talk on current campaigns by women activists, such as on bride-burning and dowry practices.

Our two week schedule in Madras, arranged by Dr. John and assisted by Dr. Leila Narayan comprised a combination of panels, lectures, visits to social service agencies and visits to villages and related projects where special programs were in operation to improve the status of women. The schedule (attached) gave us a well-rounded perspective. A series of lectures were on women in Indian history and mythology, and then a series on the issues of contemporary women. Mrs. Sarojini Varadappan, president of Women's Indian Association spoke on the "Freedom Movement and the Emancipation of Women." Among noted speakers, we heard, Mrs. Sarah Matthew, Women's Desk, Institute for Development Education; Dr. Sulochana Sekhar, principal, Lady Wellington Training College; Mrs. May George, chief engineer, Madras Housing Board; and Dr. Vera Augustus, head, Dept. of History, Women's Christian College. Lectures from women in the professions included, law, medicine, journalism, education, architecture, urban planning and television. Visits to social service agencies included Aachen House, the YMCA complex and Stree Seva Mandir. The group heard background lectures on rural women, family systems in villages, position of women in village structure and related

topics and then we visited Poonamalee Community Development which has special projects for women's economic status and literacy, and the Kanchipuram Silk Weaving Centre where women are trained to become economically independent. A particularly interesting lecture on rural women was given by Mrs. Hilda Raja on "Poverty Alleviation Program for Rural Women." We also met with Mrs. Shanta Sheela Nair, Commissioner of the Corporation of Madras, she spoke about her experiences as one of the first women to enter the Indian Administrative Service.

In addition to the official program, various members of our group met with individuals and groups on specific interests. Although the schedule was crowded, we were very grateful for the generosity of time and effort that our organizers and involved women of Madras expended on our behalf.

After Madras, during the travel phase, our group continued at each stop to meet with women academics, activists, rural women and social service groups. In Bombay, for example, we met with Sheila Barse, a well-known advocate on women's legal issues, child labor concerns and the rights of prostitutes. We also met with Vilma Patil, the editor of Femina.

In Trivandrum we participated in a "round-table" with women academics and leaders. Lakshmi Menon, the former Minister of External Affairs and a veteran of Mahatma Gandhi's crusades, spoke with passion about women's issues: "Women are employed--they work--they work 'till their bones crack." In this group were also Manu Bhaskar, head, Women's Studies, Kerala University and other faculty.

In each area women's voluntary organizations led a variety of programs, some small, such as the Handicrafts Emporium in Mahabalipuram that promotes women's skills in home industry production. Then, the more complex programs of such organizations as the YWCA, with rural development projects, hostels for battered women and women recovering from mental health problems, day care for working mothers, and skills training programs such as printing and metal work.

Back in New Delhi, we ended our official schedule with several important meetings. The group met with Mrs. Sheila Kaul, the General Secretary of the All India Congress Committee. Mrs. Kaul spoke about the role of women in the Freedom Movement, her own political history and women's representation in Parliament. We then met with the editor of Manushi: A Journal About Women and Society, Madhu Kishwar. Ms. Kishwar

discussed women's priority issues: property rights, literacy, the right to work, health care and concerns on fuel, fodder and drinking water for the rural woman.

The above over-view is intended as background to illustrate the various programatic ways in which our group was able to combine formal learning and pragmatic applications of our project's several objectives. The following section lists selected accomplishments in context with our proposal's goals.

Overall objectives met and in process:

- * Each member of the group fulfilled expectations in terms of enhancing teaching and scholarship. I have selected highlights from several of these reports to illustrate the objectives met, (pages 6-7).

- * Members of the group have developed research abstracts and are planning to participate in international, national and local conferences. Three members of the group have organized a panel for the annual women's studies colloquium at FIU, March 17, 1989. We are submitting abstracts to the National Women's Studies Association Conference, the Berkshire History Conference and related meetings.

- * As a group we plan to develop an anthology of essays based on our experience in India. First drafts of these articles are due to the project editor, Dr. Hoder-Salmon, by December 15th. The draft title is "Snapshots: Impressions of Women in India."

- * We are in the process, having accumulated listings, of developing a comprehensive up-dated bibliography which will be distributed state-wide, and copies made available for all requests. The bibliography, when completed, will have more than a thousand entries.

- * FSU Prof. Jan Kodras, developed an extensive slide show with script. Copies will be distributed to all participating universities for classroom use and for library audio-visual libraries.

- * We are developing a series of tapes that we will make available to academic institutions. The tapes feature key academic lectures, talks with prominent women and women activists, and excerpts of special programs we participated in.

* Library Acquisitions: The library holdings at Florida Atlantic University and the FIU Women's Studies Program were added to, especially with difficult to locate books and monographs.

* In context with developing international exchanges we have already made use of this opportunity and numerous correspondences between colleagues in India are underway. This fall, for example, Dr. Hem Lata Swarup, former vice-chancellor of Kanpur University, whom we met in India, came to FIU during September and gave a general lecture and made several visits to classes. She also was interviewed for a television program. Dr. Swarup's visit made the situation of India real for faculty and students in a way that is only possible through such person-to-person exchanges.

Each of the participants has submitted a preliminary report to the director on research and curriculum results. I have selected representative reports and offer a summary of objectives met for those participants as follows:

Roberta Baer; Anthropology:

Dr. Baer has added a unit to her doctoral seminar in International Development. India will be used as a case study of the larger issues covered by the course, topics include new models of eco-development, the Green Revolution, regional variation on women's status and legal changes since independence. Dr. Baer notes: "Most of my previous research and travel has been in Latin America. The Fulbright seminar gave me an opportunity to learn about a completely different culture. This has been extremely valuable to me. Anthropology constantly uses diverse ethnographic materials, both in teaching, and in research examples. I now have a whole new stock of cross-cultural references and examples for my students. I can contrast the situation of women in two semi-industrialized, but very different settings--Mexico and India."

Dr. Eileen Gregory; Biology/Nutrition:

Dr. Gregory is working on a new course for spring semester, 1989, "Women and Their Role in the Development of India." The topics of malnutrition and health, her specialties, are emphasized, however, discussions on religion, economics, and social aspects of women's lives will be included. This course meets the standards of Rollins College's "Valuation Skill" requirement. Students will be asked to evaluate their western perspective in context with arranged marriage, dowry, extended family system, and related cultural distinctions. The state of

Kerala will be used as an example of a matrilineal society. A special unit on the education of female children, family planning, workforce problems of Indian women and violence against women will head the course units. Health issues, include iron deficiency anemia, a common problem; strenuous labor; multiple pregnancies and the current use of amniocentesis to control gender. The course will use materials gathered during the seminar, such as, copies of case studies provided by the Centre for Women's Development Studies in Delhi and from various women's social service agencies, such as, from Bombay's "Streehitakarani," a medical program that works on family planning.

Heather T. Frazer; History:

Dr. Frazer concentrated on two research areas: the women in India's parliament, the Lok Sabha; and research on the practice of dowry. Dr. Frazer teaches both an undergraduate and a graduate seminar on modern India. In her class presentations Dr. Frazer will be able to describe village life, social welfare organizations and the status of urban and rural women. For her research on women in the Lok Sabha she conducted numerous interviews, such as with Ms. Mrinal Pane, a member of an advisory committee to Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi; Mrs. Maragatham Chandrasekhar, a member of the Congress Party; Mrs. Ahilya Rangnekar; and Mrs. Ela R. Bhatt, a member of the upper-house. For her research on dowry Dr. Frazer did research at Stella Maris College Library and interviewed a wide range of people we met during our seminar. Dr. Frazer's initial report to the project outlines her findings and conclusions and concluded that her ". . . professional development has been greatly enhanced by my participation in the Fulbright-Hays Faculty Seminar."

Harriet Margolis; Communication and Comparative Literature:

Dr. Margolis has begun work on a study of the use Indian women make of the media in their work towards women's full access to equal rights. She is also planning to develop a course on Asian Cinema, and while in India collected materials and resources necessary for such a course that are impossible to locate in the U.S. A course she currently teaches, "Gender, Race and Communications," has now been expanded to include a section on media in India with the use of a video on family life in Haryana. Dr. Margolis states "it is special to enliven your class lectures with personal anecdotes: women walking long lonely routes for daily water, women cracking huge granite slabs for gravel, women shopkeepers--the diverse and

complex sides of a multi-dimensional society. Dr. Margolis concludes her report: "Professionally, as well as personally, this seminar is clearly going to alter my life. I look forward to availing myself of the opportunities it has opened for me."

Janet Kodras; Geography:

Dr. Kodras, the official group photographer, has developed a slide presentation, "The Status and Roles of Women in India." The set is divided into four categories; a foundation for studying women's issues; female quality of life characteristics; the female as symbol in art, media and culture; and finally, the examples of women's organizations, projects, publishers, women's studies centers and related institutions and individuals. She has also developed an audio-tape series on such figures as Sheila Kaul, Kiran Bedi, Mrs. K.G. Rama, Sheila Barse, May George and Vilma Patil. In addition, Dr. Kodras has incorporated her experience into two of her human geography courses. She uses India as a national case study and compares differences and commonalities between the U.S. and India in gender relations, the status of the national birth control program and the effect of the green revolution on women. In the concluding section of her report she notes: "As a geographer I find travel critical to my teaching and research. . . . Even reading extensively about a place is no substitute for actually being there to experience the culture first hand. I thank the Fulbright-Hays program for allowing me to learn about India."

Susan Waltz; International Relations:

Dr. Waltz has already incorporated her experience into her teaching, a course she is offering this semester is on "Mexico City to Nairobi: Women as an Issue in International Relations" which concentrates on the women of India. Dr. Waltz's research interests in India involved two issues: caste in contemporary India and the socially deleterious effects of the Green Revolution on women. She has a preliminary paper ready on each of these topics. The essay on caste takes as a theme the situation of upper caste women for whom the rewards for self-sacrifice of prestige and social status have eroded in contemporary times and their challenge to redefine their status within Indian society. The Green Revolution article reviews sites Dr. Waltz was able to visit in rural India, interviews she conducted and concentrates on the reduction of female participation in agriculture, particularly in the higher-salary and/or prestigious tasks.

Conclusion:

Indian women have been a part of the world-wide awakening of women. The struggle for women's rights in India has a long history, going back to at least the mid-nineteenth century, and more purposefully, as part of the mass struggles against British rule in the early decades of the twentieth century. In modern times the struggle continues, and is conducted on many fronts. Perhaps most interesting to academic women is the way in which the Indian women's studies movement has taken the forefront of the campaign for rights, and has combined research and teaching with pragmatic projects in rural and urban areas.

The Indian Association for Women's Studies was organized in 1982, based on a resolution adopted from a national conference in Bombay. The movement owes its growth to committed individuals, official patronage and the support of international funding agencies. There are now eight universities with a curriculum in undergraduate studies: New Delhi, Banares Hindu University, Panjab University, Kerala University, North Eastern Hill University, Ranchi University, South Gujarat University and S.N.D.T. Women's University in Bombay. The government has endorsed the development of women's studies with a 1986 University Grants Commission Report.

As an illustration of one university program, S.N.D.T. Women's University is typical. They sponsor publications, a documentation center, a women's archive (in the planning stage) and numerous research projects. For example, they have organized a rural development project in nine villages in South Gujarat on health, literacy, job-training and leadership training. A typical paper, of many made available at the program is one titled, "Women's Work and Family Strategies among Cane-bamboo Artisan Families in South Ratnagiri District."

The women's studies movement is committed and growing. The faculty and students know how vital their work is, as Meenakshi Subramaniam noted, "For the majority of women in our country it is more work than wages, more load than capacity, and more compulsion than choice." To study the "roots and structure of an inequality that leads to marginality" is at the base of the women's studies movement, a goal that women all over the world share, and that we, the members of the FIU Seminar, are now more knowledgeable about and committed to as a result of our seminar experience.

Our days and nights in India were powerfully compelling. In Bombay we visited a slum health project where nutritional advice and birth control methods are illustrated on little handkerchiefs so that illiterate women can refer to them and learn. In Kanchipuram, a famous silk weaving center, we were taken around and shown with great pride cottage industry looms where girls learned the labor intensive work of weaving. In a coastal village near Mahabalipuram we all became anthropologists for a moment in time and entered a tribal woman's hut to receive her hospitality. We read in the morning's paper where a slum woman sold her twin children for 10 rupees (80¢) each because she was hungry. We practised in the privacy of our rooms the sensation of walking about in the world while holding the edge of a face-covering clenched in our teeth. In Kerala we drove by women crouched along a steep hill in the searing sun breaking granite boulders into gravel. We met dozens of women who shared the stories of their personal and professional histories: lawyers, doctors, journalists, bankers, business women and others--in all cases we felt enriched by the generosity, the friendships offered and the bonds created.

There are a thousand such moments. Our teaching and research are deeply enlivened by the enrichment of cultural exchange. I know I speak for the other Florida participants when I reiterate our deep appreciation to Fulbright-Hays. We hope our new knowledge, curriculum revisions, publications and related academic advancement that we will share with students and colleagues is payment-in-kind.

ADDENDUM

Selected materials:

Participant list
Seminar Brochure
Academic Program at Madras
Newspaper articles